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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1387
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 9562
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1815
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 3892
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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SUBJECT: THAI ANTI-JUNTA GROUP LEADERS ARRESTED AFTER
VIOLENT DEMONSTRATION

REF: BANGKOK 4003 (VIOLENT DEMONSTRATION)

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11. (SBU) Summary: The leaders of the demonstration against GEN Prem (reftel) were detained by police on July 26 and denied bail. Thai officials briefed the diplomatic community, emphasizing that they would respect the right of citizens to peaceful protest, but would not allow violence, or disruptive demonstrations in residential neighborhoods. The Thai public in general is unlikely to have much sympathy for the demonstrators, given the evidence of violence shown in the news reports, but the detention of the protest leaders, especially after the courts had said they would not issue an arrest warrant, will may provoke a sharp reaction from their supporters. End summary.

12. (U) The authorities have detained nine top figures of the Democratic Alliance Against Dictatorship (the DAAD -- also known as the United Front of Democracy against Dictatorship, or UDD) for their role in organizing the unruly July 22 protest at the residence of Privy Council President Prem Tinsulanonda (reftel). Pursuant to a court order sprung on the protest organizers when they voluntarily appeared at the Bangkok Criminal Court on July 26, the Police moved the DAAD figures to a police station, where they may be held for up to 12 days. (This detention period may be renewed.) The charges include holding an illegal assembly that caused unrest; all charges are based on the criminal code, not on any legal provisions enacted after the coup. The suspects were denied bail.

13. (U) The arrests follow a July 24 visit by Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont to Prem, at his residence. In public remarks there, Surayud said that the group has the "intention of undermining the highest institution on which the country and the public rely," i.e., the monarchy. (Privy Council members are selected by the King, and GEN Prem is, in particular, widely viewed as being close to the King. The demonstrators demand that Prem resign may be viewed as preempting the King's right to choose his advisors.)

14. (U) Ministry of Foreign Affairs Permanent Secretary Virasakdi Futrakul and Police region 1 commander Maj. Gen.

Manit Wongsomboun led a July 26 briefing for the diplomatic corps to explain the government's perspective on the unruly demonstration. The MFA permsec emphasized that the Thai government would act in accordance with international law and recognized the right of the people to demonstrate peacefully. The police commander went through the events of the day step by step, underscoring that the demonstrators had taken actions such as throwing police barricades into the canal and commandeering city garbage trucks and driving them through barricades, which showed that the group was not committed to carrying out a peaceful protest.

15. (U) He explained that the demonstrators had arrived at GEN Prem's house at about 3 pm, and blared speeches through 4 large loudspeakers directed at Prem's house and other houses in the neighborhood. Police tried to negotiate with the demonstrators until about 7 pm, but the group insisted that it would remain in place until Prem resigned from the Privy Council. The police used tear gas and pepper spray, but the crowd would not disperse. He said that several police were sent to try to climb into the truck carrying the demonstration leaders and the sound equipment in order to turn off the loudspeakers. (Note: this was the only significant divergence from the news coverage, which had reported that the officers tried to climb into the truck to arrest the UDD leaders. End note.) The crowd then turned violent, throwing stones and other objects, damaging police cars and other property. Gen. Manit said that the authorities had previously allowed demonstrations to continue without any interference when the demonstrators were on Sanam Luang or were protesting at public institutions, such as the Army HQ. However, they would not allow a demonstration to continue in a private neighborhood like this one. He emphasized that only police were involved in the action, and that they were unarmed.

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16. (SBU) Comment: As noted in reftel, we believe most Thais looked askance at the behavior of the protesters, and public sympathy for the detainees will be limited. The detention does not appear unjustified, and the authorities likely intend to signal clearly that, while they have allowed large demonstrations to take place, they will not tolerate violence. The way in which the group was taken into custody, however, may occasion concern; the court had initially declined to issue an arrest warrant if the group presented themselves voluntarily. Once the police presented their evidence against the group to the court, however, they requested a "detention warrant" which the court granted. This may provoke a sharp reaction from the UDD supporters. End Comment.

17. (U) The names of the arrested DAAD (UDD) leaders are:

- Chatuporn Promphan
- Jakrapob Penkair
- Nattawut Saikua
- Veeera Musikhapong
- Viputhalaeng Pattanaphumthai
- Weng Tojirakarn
- Jaran Dithapichai
- Manit Jitjanklab
- Apiwant Viriyachai

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